

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
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R 261716Z APR 77
FM AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4847
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 RIO DE JANEIRO 1924

FOLLOWING, ORIGINALLY SENT ACTION BRASILIA INFO SAO PAULO,
APRIL 25, 1977, IS REPEATED FOR YOUR INFO:

QUOTE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE RIO DE JANEIRO 1924

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS : PFOR
SUBJECT : COMMENTS ON CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

1. I HEARD SOME INTERESTING POLITICAL COMMENTS AT A DINNER
APRIL 21 OFFERED BY OPINIAO'S FERNANDO GASPARIAN. MOST OF
THE GUESTS WERE LEFTWING INTELLECTUALS AND MDB AUTHENTICO
POLITICIANS, THE LATTER INCLUDING PERNAMBUCCO POLITICIANS
SENATOR MARCOS FREIRE AND FEDERAL DEPUTY FERNANDES SOARES
LIRA AND EX-DEPUTY FROM BAHIA, FRANCISCO PINTO (CASSATED
AND IMPRISONED 1974 FOR INSULTING PINOCHET). POLITICS DOMI-
NATED THE CONVERSATIONS FROM WHICH A NUMBER OF THEMES EMERGED
THAT SEEMED TO ENJOY SUBSTANTIAL CONSENSUS AND MAY BE REP-
RESENTATIVE OF VIEWS HELD BY BRAZILIANS OF LIBERAL-LEFT
PERSUASION.

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2. WITH REGARD TO THE CURRENT SITUATION IN GENERAL FOLLOWING
GEISEL'S PROCLAIMED POLITICAL REFORMS, I DETECTED A CURRENT
OF OPTIMISM. GEISEL IS SEEN TO HAVE GONE TOO FAR IN CASUISTIC
MANIPULATIONS OF THE SYSTEM AND, HAVING ACTED VIRTUALLY BY
HIMSELF WITHOUT WIDE CONSULTATIONS AMONG MILITARY AND POLITICAL
SUPPORTERS, IS NOW ISOLATED AS NEVER BEFORE. HE HAS ALSO
ANTAGONIZED A WIDE AND VARIED RANGE OF IMPORTANT OPINION

GROUPS INCLUDING CHURCH, BAR ASSOCIATION, ENTREPRENEURIAL CLASS AND OF COURSE THE STUDENTS AND INTELLECTUALS. EVEN ARENA IS DISAFFECTED, THOUGH FEW MEMBERS ARE SAYING SO OPENLY. REFERRING TO THE REFORM MEASURES, SOMEONE REMARKED THAT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT A MILITARY COUP HAS BEEN UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT THE CLEAR SUPPORT OF NOT ONLY THE MILITARY BUT ALSO KEY PUBLIC OPINION GROUPS. THIS IN CONTEXT OF EXISTING GENERAL DISCONTENT OVER LIVING COSTS AND OTHER ECONOMIC PROBLEMS.

3. THE OPPOSITION SEES OPPORTUNITY NOW FOR FIRST TIME FOR A BROADLY BASED CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT THAT COULD BECOME POWERFUL ENOUGH EVEN TO UNSEAT GEISEL BEFORE HIS TERM IS OVER OR, IF NOT THAT, AT LEAST SET THE STAGE FOR A MORE AGREEABLE PRESIDENTIAL CHOICE IN 1978 AND FOR SUBSEQUENT POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION. IN THIS CONNECTION, MARCOS FREIRE ADMITTED THAT THE CALL FOR A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY NOT REALLY EXPECTED TO ACHIEVE THAT END IN THE SHORT TERM BUT WAS RATHER INTENDED TO BE PART OF THE BROADER CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING CAMPAIGN.

4. ESSENTIAL TO SUCCESS OF SUCH A STRATEGY IS A DIVISION IN THE SYSTEM'S MILITARY BASE AND ON THIS THERE IS APPARENTLY SOME HOPE. MANY BELIEVE IMPORTANT SEGMENTS OF THE ARMY HAVE BEEN OFFENDED BY GEISEL'S LATEST ARBITRARY ACTION WHICH HAVE EXACERBATED OTHER GRIEVANCES. THERE WAS SOME DISCUSSION OF 3D ARMY COMMANDER GENERAL BETHLEM AS A POSSIBLE STANDARD-BEARER FOR A DISSIDENT MOVEMENT WITHIN THE ARMY. FROTA'S NAME ALSO CAME UP AS A POTENTIAL ANTI-FIGUEIREDO CANDIDATE. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE LATTER IS ASSUMED TO BE GEISEL'S UNQUESTIONED CHOICE AND IS VIEWED WITH ABHORENCE BY THIS GROUP. THEY SEEM TO FEEL TOO THAT HIS CANDIDACY MAY CONTRIBUTE TO DIVISION WITHIN THE MILITARY.

5. THERE WAS SOME TALK OF THE ROLE OF THE PRESS, WHICH IS ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY ALIGNED AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SHARPEST CRITICISM THE GOVERNMENT HAS KNOWN SINCE 1964. THE PRESIDENT WOULD LIKE TO REIMPOSE CENSORSHIP, THEY SAY, BUT MOST THINK HE WILL BE RESTRAINED BY FEAR OF DOMESTIC BACKLASH AND ADVERSE FOREIGN REACTION. SOME THINK, HOWEVER, THAT HE WILL FEEL COMPELLED TO CLAMP DOWN BECAUSE OF HIS PERSONAL SENSITIVITY TO CRITICISM AND APPRECIATION OF THE REAL THREAT THE PRESS REPRESENTS.

6. THERE SEEMED TO BE GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT THE REACTION OF THE UNITED STATES TO EVENTS IN BRAZIL WOULD HAVE AN IMPORTANT BEARING ON THE COURSE OF EVENTS -- SOME THINK EVEN DECISIVE. THEY POINTED TO GEISEL'S CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE

AMERICAN AND WORLD REACTION AS A RESTRAINING FACTOR IN HIS RESPONSE TO THE CONGRESSIONAL REBUFF ON JUDICIAL REFORM, ASSERTING THAT HE WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE GONE MUCH FURTHER, WITH CASSATIONS, ARRESTS, AND PERHAPS A MUCH LONGER CONGRESSIONAL RECESS, AS OCCURRED IN 1968. IN THIS CONNECTION, AT THE END OF THE EVENING MARCOS FREIRE, FERNANDO LIRA AND EX-DEPUTY PINTO TOOK ME ASIDE TO MAKE FERVENT APPEALS FOR US BACKING IN THE FORM OF AT LEAST EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT FOR THE MDB IN ITS CRUSADE FOR DEMOCRACY IN BRAZIL. ONE REMARKED THAT "THE COMMUNISTS KNOW WHAT RUSSIA WANTS OF THEM BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THE UNITED STATES WANTS OF US." THEY STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF BRAZIL AS A MODEL FOR ALL OF SOUTH AMERICA AND ASSERTED THAT HERE IN BRAZIL THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A KEY CHOICE BETWEEN EFFECTIVELY PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA OR ENCOURAGING FASCIST REGIMES SUCH AS THE GEISEL ADMINISTRATION. THEY EMPHASIZED THAT SUPPORT FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HUMAN RIGHTS DOES NOT MAKE SENSE IF LIMITED ONLY TO EFFORTS TO MODERATE SPECIFIC POLICE EXCESSES OR TO GAIN RELEASE OF A FEW POLITICAL PRISONERS. WHAT WE MUST ADDRESS IS POLITICAL SYSTEMS UNDER WHICH ABUSES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE INEVITABLE.

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INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

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8. DURING REMARKS TO ME, THERE WERE REPEATED EXPRESSIONS

OF FAITH AND HOPE IN THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. BY HIS PAST STATEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING HIS OAS SPEECH, CARTER IN THEIR VIEW HAS REKINDLED FAITH IN AMERICAN MORAL LEADERSHIP. EX-DEPUTY PINTO MENTIONED HOW IMPRESSED HE HAD BEEN ON RECENT TRAVELS IN THE INTERIOR OF BAHIA WITH THE EXTENT OF HERO WORSHIP BEING ACCORDED CARTER BY THE COMMON PEOPLE. THEY STRESSED THAT THE CHOICE FOR BRAZIL WAS ULTIMATELY BETWEEN THE DEMOCRATIC IDEALS REPRESENTED BY CARTER OR COMMUNISM WHICH THEY SEE AS THE ALTERNATIVE IF LIBERAL FORCES ARE NOT ABLE TO CAPTURE LEADERSHIP AS THE PRESENT "FASCIST" SYSTEM COLLAPSES.

9. COMMENT: IN THESE DISCUSSIONS, I PLAYED THE ROLE OF INTERESTED LISTENER AND AVOIDED COMMENT ON THE US ROLE, THOUGH I NOTED THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS ON BEHALF OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY IN HIS OAS SPEECH AS EXPRESSIVE OF A GENERAL POSTURE, AND WARNED AGAINST EXPECTING ANY US ACTION THAT COULD BE CONSTRUED AS INTERFERENCE IN BRAZIL'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. I ALSO RECALLED USG NORMAL AND OBVIOUS DESIRE IN GENERAL TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH OPINION IN BRAZIL AS A MEANS OF ENHANCING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE. ONE OF THE GROUP MENTIONED TO ME IN THIS CONNECTION AN IMPRESSION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AMONG MDB POLITICIANS THAT THE EMBASSY HAD BECOME MORE CAUTIOUS THAN BEFORE IN ITS CONTACTS WITH MDB LEADERS IN BRASILIA. THIS WAS SAID TO BE DISCOURAGING TO THE MDB. I SAID I WAS SURE THAT EMBASSY OFFICERS, LIKE MYSELF, WANTED TO CONTINUE COMMUNICATIONS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL VIEWPOINTS IN BRAZIL AS PART OF THEIR NORMAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

UNQUOTE

EMBASSY COMMENT: THE LEVEL OF THE EMBASSY'S CONTACTS WITH THIS GROUP REMAINS THE SAME AS ALWAYS. END EMBASSY COMMENT.

DEXTER

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